

Dockside market feasibility study

A summary of what San Diego's public wants at a dockside fish market



Study background

Dockside seafood sales allow the public to buy directly from the fishermen in order to increase accessibility to fresh, healthy seafood; boost the local economy; and build an appreciation for local coastal and ocean ecosystems.

Our project goals were to test the feasibility of these markets in San Diego and raise awareness of local fisheries. A seafood tasting event was held at Tuna Harbor on 9/7/2013 for a group of locavores from around San Diego to meet this goal. Chefs, fishermen, nutritionists and scientists introduced all aspects of local species, and participants provided information about what they would like to see in direct seafood sales. An online follow up survey followed ~2 mos. later to assess effectiveness of the event in increasing awareness and fostering culinary adventure.

Two lessons emerged:

1. Demand for dockside markets exists
2. What will sell? Fish; "new" species (with some effort); and fish tales!

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1. Demand exists

Top 5 motivations for wanting direct: fresh, eco-friendly & healthy seafood, supporting local fishermen, knowledge of food source.

Market visits. 25% of people said they would make the trip to a direct market every 1-2 weeks, 39% said monthly, 28% said every 3-4 months. And these rates increase with convenience (low traffic, lots of parking, good time, near home).



Seafood amount. Most (42%) said they would buy enough product for 1-2 lbs of prepared seafood; and over half (51%) thought they would buy 2 types of seafood per visit.



Value. Most people will pay more for direct seafood; 22% said they'd pay 5-10% more, 35% said 10-20% more, 14% said 20-30% more and 9% said >30% more.

Will travel to fresh fish. Most people (43%) are willing to drive 15-30 min for direct seafood, 35% would travel 10-15 min, 9% would go 30-45 min.



2. What will sell?

A little of a lot of things. Fish topped the list of desired products, in particular California halibut, white seabass, yellowtail, sablefish and Bluefin tuna, but no less than 25% of participants expressed interest (rating of 4 or 5 out of 5) in every single species landed in San Diego.

The familiar and the new. Seafood preference was greater with familiarity; but the good news is that there are culinary adventurers among us.

Most (61%) of people would be willing to try seafood that is new to them if it was offered at a dockside market. Some would try “new” seafood if they received prep and cooking tips (13%) and/or free samples (20%).

A lasting impression. 86% of people said that because of the tasting event, they are more willing to prepare and/or order seafood that is new to them.



Edible rice paper QR code linking consumer to NOAA's Fishwatch website. Photo: Harney Sushi



Food knowledge. Knowing the source of seafood was a main motivator for people buying direct. People want the story of their dinner-- who caught it, on what boat, with what gear and from where?!

Fish stories and waterfront culture wanted! At least 61% of people had not spoken to a member of the fishing community before the dockside event. Those who had spoken coveted conversations with sport & commercial fishermen, and their fishmongers. Within 2 months, 10% of people made a point of talking to and/or buying seafood directly from fishermen; 42% visited the waterfront again when they wouldn't have otherwise.

